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ABSTRACT

The ideas and practices of two philosopher-educators and their implications for experiential education are surveyed. Earl Kelley holds that learning is not a matter of acquisition and acceptance, but a result of process and subject to continuous modification. He maintains that the educational system disregards and impedes the learner's purpose. He proposes that students learn, without coercion, in accordance with their own purposes (or needs) and experiences. The experiential learning process begins with perception and purpose, moves to experience, and then proceeds to thought and value, which results in knowledge or learning. Education is growth that enables the whole organism to become more competent to cope with life. For Jiddu Krishnamurti, the categorization process by which we attempt to establish reality as a series of facts is not learning, but a distortion of learning. The function of education and learning is to create human beings who are integrated and intelligent. Intelligence is the transcendent mind, which can perceive the wholeness of something in a more spiritual sense. Knowledge is that body of data that comprises our rational picture of the world and how to live in it. Krishnamurti cautions us about education systems that focus too exclusively on the building up of knowledge at the expense of cultivating the larger mind, or intelligence. The highest function of education is to bring about an integrated learner who is capable of dealing with all aspects of life. (Contains 17 references.) (TD)

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Chapter 8

PRACTICE AND PERSPECTIVE: TWO VIEWS OF EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

Ed Raiola

Ed Raiola earned his BA in Philosophy at California State University at Chico, an MEd in Outdoor Education from the University of Northern Colorado, and a PhD from Union Graduate School. Between rounds of study, Ed developed and tested his interests as a VISTA volunteer and as a teacher at Unity College. Now a committed educator teaching at Warren Wilson College, he uses outdoor recreation and environmental studies as vehicles to train other educators. His special interest is to investigate the respective roles that intention, attention, and intuition play in wise outdoor leadership.

This chapter breaks new ground in experiential education by describing the contributions of two thinkers who have not previously been recognized as heroes of experiential education. Ed Raiola courageously leads us into the down-to-earth understandings of Earl Kelley and challenges us with the ethereal and mystical insights of Jiddu Krishnamurti. In doing this, he places them into the pantheon of experiential educators along with people like Thomas Dewey, William James, Kurt Hahn, and Charity James.

Foreword

What if we said that in order for learning to take place, students must learn in accordance with their own purpose (or needs) and experiences? What if schools emphasized opportunities for students to talk and listen, read, write, do, and reflect as they approached course content? What if we all agreed that 1) learning is by nature an active endeavor, and 2) that different people learn in different ways? How would schools look and what methods would we use to teach?

If knowing about the world, and about life, consisted only of assimilating a body of static, concrete information, learning by rote might be the most efficient model for educating anybody about anything. What we know about teaching and learning seems to contradict those notions. To illustrate, let's summarize what is known about teaching and learning.

- People come to classes with their own perceptual frameworks firmly intact, rather than as "empty vessels" to be filled with knowledge (Erickson, 1984, p. 55).
- People learn in different ways (Kolb, 1984; Briggs-Meyers, 1980).
- Learning is a dynamic process that involves teacher and student as co-inquirers (Tiberius, 1986).
- Learning does not happen by just absorbing content (taking lots of notes and memorizing for exams), but by critically analyzing, discussing, and using content in meaningful ways (Hutchings, 1990).
- Lecturing has severe limitations as a predominant teaching strategy:
  - In the first ten minutes of lecture, students retain 70% of the information; in the last ten minutes, 20% (McKeachie, 1986).
  - While teachers are lecturing, students are not attending to what is being said 40% of the time (Pollio, 1984).

- Students lose their initial interest, and attention levels continue to drop, as a lecture proceeds (Verner & Dickinson, 1967).
- Four months after taking an introductory psychology course, students knew only 8% more than a control group who had never taken the course (Rickard, Rogers, Ellis, & Beidleman, 1988).

For many people, knowing about the world, and about life, has apparently been enriched by translation through the individual's perceptual frames (talking and listening, reading, writing, doing, and reflecting), yielding a deeper, broader world view than might be possible without such translation.

In my search to improve my teaching and learning, I began a journey to learn from the rich history of progressive thinking and writing about experience and education. I was especially touched by the ideas and practices of two relatively "unknown" practitioners: the philosopher-educators, Earl C. Kelley and Jiddu Krishnamurti, surveyed in this paper. They both address the role of experience in learning, which is especially relevant to those of us who have struggled as teachers, experimenting and trying to expand our repertoire of teaching approaches, sometimes successfully, sometimes not. Kelley's concepts emanate from a Western mechanistic tradition, but Krishnamurti's evolve from a more synergistic Eastern world view.

Earl C. Kelley

One of the less-recognized contributors to the field of experiential education is Earl C. Kelley. Dr. Kelley's rich career included work as a public school science teacher, a secondary school administrator, an instructor, and, finally, a distinguished professor of education at Eastern Michigan University. His writings include *Education for What is Real* (1947), *The Workshop Way of Learning* (1951), *Education and the Nature of Man* (1952), and *In Defense of Youth* (1962). In order to understand Kelley's model of the experiential learning process, we must first examine some of his basic beliefs about the nature of learning and perception.

Kelley (1947) suggests that many of the ills of our educational system and its product (people) come from two major areas: "(1) That we present knowledge as absolute and existing before learning can begin, instead of something to be lived; (2) that we disregard and often work counter to the learner's purpose or needs" (p. 72). For Kelley, learning must begin before knowledge can exist; learning is not a matter of acquisition and acceptance, but is a result of process and is subject to continuous modification. Learning is made possible through memory and is uniquely held and uniquely used. To Kelley, knowledge is what we know, subjective in nature and unique to each learner.

Kelley's second point is that the educational system disregards and, therefore, impedes the learner's purpose. From his perspective, the traditional classroom has two important factors: the teacher and the subject matter. The student gets his or her purpose from the teacher and then learns, perhaps, the subject matter presented by the teacher. The subject matter remains a given, and most of the modification necessary to bring the student and subject matter together takes place on the part of the student. If the student can find suitable meaning within the framework of the subject matter, that is considered optimal, but if not, then the student must be coerced. While we may not think of grades as a form of coercion, the threat posed by this judgment upon each student's worth, according to the criteria set by the teacher, is not at all subtle.

What Kelley and Rasey (1952) proposed is that students learn, without coercion, in accordance with their own purposes (or needs) and experiences. Therefore, we must look to a modification of the role and usefulness of the subject matter, the role of the teacher, and the learning environment. In order for learning (seen as a continuous dynamic throughout life) to take place, the learner must have the purpose and experience to receive whatever is available in any particular situation. Kelley and Rasey believe that one cannot teach anything until the learner is ready to learn it:

> When the organism lacks experience and purpose to receive, it lacks readiness. Now we can see more clearly how crucial to education the matter of readiness is. The force of this idea is much greater when we realize that readiness is basic to the nature of the perceptual process, and lack of readiness is not a matter of unwillingness to learn. (p. 34)

They go on to say that if the energy spent by teachers (as well as learners) in defying this factor of readiness could be turned to constructive uses, enormous progress in growth could be made and readiness itself could in many cases be acquired. For example, we educators could put a high premium on active, experiential learning for elementary- and middle-school-age students who are at a developmental point where they interact with and learn from their environment kinesthetically. Honoring and addressing students' readiness to learn through their entire sensory apparatus, instead of such a strong emphasis being placed on sitting in a classroom, passively giving back what has been handed out, might transform the majority of behavior problems we find in schools.

For Kelley and Rasey (1952), an individual's experiential learning process begins with perception and purpose, moves to experience, and then proceeds to thought and value, which results in knowledge or learning. Perception is the person's line to his or her externality; it is an interpretation made by the learner that comes into consciousness, originating within the learner and not from without. Purpose, as Kelley uses it, means a conscious or unconscious urge to satisfy a perceived need. "Purpose is a driving force which gives expression for, or points a path to, the expenditure of the energy which we constitute" (p. 55). Purpose is both conscious and unconscious. Conscious purpose is that which comes into our awareness; unconscious purpose is the biological "driving force of tissue purpose that shows the path through which energy may be spent with compliance and satisfaction. It is the force through which the plant, the animal, the human being become more perfectly that which it already is" (p. 55).

Purpose not only influences what can come into awareness and become part of one's constructs about reality, it also points the path along which the energy that makes up the total person can be spent. The learning that can take place as an individual interacts with his or her environment and the way in which the accumulation of power and knowledge can be used depends upon the person's purpose.

Kelley and Rasey (1952) state that "experience is the process of undergoing, the contact with the concrete, the working out of the project circumstances" (p. 38). Humans are bundles of experiences, in flux and in process, continually being modified. We acquire knowledge through experience. In the learning process it is not the event alone which constitutes an experience, but the interaction between the event and the experiencing person. "Knowledge . . . is a product or residue of the perception-experience process. . . . It is a result of process, and is subject to continuous modification as process goes forward in a changing world" (p. 71).

Since we have the ability to remember, there is a memory of experience. Something is left after the experience is over. Kelley describes what remains as knowledge, ever subjective in nature and unique to each learner. Although in many of my courses I begin with very carefully designed, specific learning objectives that I hope the students will be able to achieve or demonstrate, I usually find that, by the end of the course, the lessons learned are as many and varied as the students themselves, sometimes having nothing whatsoever to do with the education objectives that I had planned.

The final step in Kelley's process is that of thought and attribution of value. After we have had an experience, we think about it, make some generalizations, and may apply our knowledge to new situations. We may come up with new perceptions or new purpose. We may evaluate the effect of the experience upon us, making value judgments. A young, outdoor-leadership student might start leading a new group feeling quite pleased with the plan she's devised for their activities, only to find that the group is thoroughly bored with what she has arranged. She may go through stages of frustration and reevaluation of herself and the work before she realizes that other people have different values than hers.

Thus, this thinking phase of Kelley's mode involves the organization and integration of experience. For Kelley, we are all accumulated experience; we perceive what we have the experience and purpose to perceive, and take our perceptions with us, so that our future perceptions are shaped by them. Kelley's (1947) view of this interrelationship between the individual, with all of his/her history, and the environment, is "growth in its widest meaning; growth

which enables the whole organism to become more competent to cope with life" (p.72)—it is education.

Jiddu Krishnamurti

Attempting to crystallize the extraordinary life and singular teaching of Krishnamurti is like trying to grasp a child's blown bubble: as soon as you think you have hold of it, you discover that your hand is empty. Since the essence of his life work was to question the attachments which we ordinary humans have created for our own reassurances about "how the world is," describing his confoundingly simple teachings is a paradoxical task. Beliefs, disciplines of a prescribed sort, methods of achieving anything (and, indeed, most all of the "anythings" we think we should achieve), and teachers as sources of knowledge are all cleanly dismantled by Krishnamurti as distractions from the real brilliance of self that evolves from the quiet mind. Paradoxically, to put words and images to this man's thought is, in his view, to partially obscure it.

In 1910, at the age of about 14, Krishnamurti became the protégé of the leaders of the Theosophical Society, C. W. Leadbeater and Annie Besant, who saw him as candidate for the next corporeal vehicle of the "World Teacher" or "Christ-energy," according to their belief in the hierarchy of spiritual matters guiding the evolution of humankind on earth. They all but kidnapped him from his widowed Brahmin father, and took him, with his younger brother, to England to be trained, in accordance with the clairvoyantly received wishes of the Master. Krishnamurti was carefully fed, exercised, and taught the disciplines of meditation under the auspices of the Theosophists.

After several years of this not-at-all-uncomfortable life, Krishnamurti began to have intense spiritual experiences of his own and to talk about them with others. Around 1929, there developed a schism of sorts between him and the established power-figures of the Theosophical Society when he began to teach that:

> Truth is a pathless land, and you cannot approach it by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect. If an organization be created for this purpose, it becomes a crutch, a weakness, a bondage,

> and must cripple the individual, and prevent him from growing, from establishing his uniqueness, which lies in his discovery for himself of that absolute, unconditioned Truth. (Lutyens, 1983, p.15)

Krishnamurti continued to expand his enigmatic teaching, now long dissociated from the Theosophists, through a loosely structured Foundation which has focused on providing forums for his talks and publishing his books, as well as through a few Krishnamurti schools in Europe, India, and the United States. The volumes that particularly address the topics of education, knowledge, and learning are: *Education and the Significance of Life* (1953), *Think on These Things* (1964), and *Krishnamurti on Education* (1974).

From his perspective, education is much more than a matter of accumulating information and knowledge. The function of education and learning is to create human beings who are integrated and, therefore, intelligent. We need to remember that, for this man, the categorization process by which we attempt to establish reality as a series of facts is not learning, but is rather a distortion of learning.

Krishnamurti speaks of mind functions as operating upon different levels. The "intellect," in his terms, is the function of the rational mind, that which collects information and technical skills for living in the world on a day-to-day basis: driving the car, remembering your phone number, balancing your checkbook. "Intelligence," however, is not the ability to accumulate information, in Krishnamurti's terms; it is, rather, the transcendent mind, that which can perceive the wholeness of something in a more spiritual sense. For Krishnamurti, the function of education is to create learners who are integrated and intelligent. Intelligence goes beyond information. "Intelligence is the capacity to perceive the essential, the *what is* [italics added]; and to awaken this capacity in oneself and in others" (Krishnamurti, 1953, p. 14). This aspect of mind is not at all involved with the residue of facts: on the contrary, one must quiet the internal voices that endlessly catalogue our beliefs about reality in order to experience through intelligence.

"Knowledge" is that body of data that comprises our rational picture of the world and how to live in it, and, while Krishnamurti recognizes its usefulness, he cautions us about education systems that focus too exclusively on the building-up of knowledge at the

expense of cultivating the larger mind, or intelligence. It is this cultivation, a freeing from the limits of knowledge, that he considers true "Learning." Learning, an active and immediate experience of the self in relationship to whatever else is in the moment, "... is never an additive process.... Learning ceases when there is only accumulation of knowledge. There is only learning when there is no accumulation at all" (Krishnamurti, 1974, pp. 101-102).

This semantic entanglement serves to remind us that as soon as we begin to describe and classify any internal experience, we have ceased to be fully in that experience and have stepped back to observe ourselves. It is this sort of solidifying that language attempts, in an effort to hold the object still enough for another's scrutiny. Krishnamurti would have us consider the possibility that learning involves only the action, the energy, the awareness of the experience, without translating into fact, which "becomes an anchorage which holds your mind and prevents it from going further. In the process of inquiry the mind sheds from day to day . . . so that it is always fresh and uncontaminated by yesterday's experience" (Krishnamurti, 1964, p. 195). Yet there seems to be a possible compromise, wherein learning through doing, integratively, creates a balance between the sublime and the mundane: "It is this experiencing that will put capacity and technique in the right place" (Krishnamurti, 1953, p. 17). Accordingly, in practical discussion of the role of education, Krishnamurti emphasizes the importance of developing the learner's ability to discover where and when knowledge and technical skills are necessary, and where they are irrelevant and even harmful. For Krishnamurti, the highest function of education is to bring about an integrated learner who is capable of dealing with all aspects of life. This presupposes an education environment that not only recognizes the "intelligence" it offers students, but also helps to nurture it. "Education in its truest sense is the understanding of oneself, for it is within each one of us that the whole of existence is gathered" (Krishnamurti, 1953, p. 21).

Afterword

Each of these authors offers a rich perspective on education and the learning process. Although they have varied and divergent beliefs about the nature and purpose of education, each agrees that experience is somehow central to the learning process.

Education, as learning in doing, involves a unique and special relationship between the event and the experiencing person(s). Kelly and Krishnamurti both recognize that it is the way in which the individual interacts with his or her experience, and the meanings gleaned by that individual, that form the learning process.

They differ most dramatically in their assumptions (or lack of them) about the nature of reality and the character of the individual's relationship to it. Earl Kelley's thinking is grounded and shaped by a mechanistic world view. He assumes that reality is different for each of us, both through our individualized perceptions of whatever is out there and also by virtue of our unique purposes as individuals, which shape our perceptions. Kelley argues that, for each person, any given object will be experienced in a way that is somewhat, or even radically, different. Therefore, although as an educator I may assume some consensus about "what the ocean is like," I cannot anticipate the effects of a marine biology expedition on any two individuals.

Krishnamurti almost ruthlessly dismantles everything except pure awareness; his sense of reality is far removed from Kelley's. He speaks of experience on the spiritual (not religious) level, rather as a synonym for aliveness. The physical world and its effects are, for Krishnamurti, a temporarily necessary distraction (since we live in bodies) from a higher truth. Education, then, becomes any method for clearing the essential vision of the learner, freeing her or him from the cobwebs of limiting beliefs about self and life. To provide an experience for another in the ways that Kelley might propose would, for Krishnamurti, be to obscure that person's process. Each of us must seek our own clarity, and the journey of that seeking is education.

My own search and practice has continually informed me about the art and science of teaching. Kelley's writings emphasize the science of experiential learning while Krishnamurti embraces the art

or spirit of education. I adhere to Krishnamurti's notion that education should seek to help the leaner to become free of limiting beliefs of self and life and become a whole or integrated person.

I have learned that I must take some responsibility to impel and provide opportunities for people to get excited or motivated to learn. I have found that I must be prepared and create a framework around what we will be learning together (Kelley's notion of providing purpose and experience to help create readiness in the learner). I must also listen to the people I work with because they do indeed know what they want to learn.

The puzzle that keeps coming back to me as an educator is that I believe that there are certain knowledge bases that my students should be exposed to or demonstrate competence in. These can range from knowing the history and philosophy of experiential education to demonstrating how to plan, lead, and facilitate initiative games. My presupposition about what constitutes "minimum competencies" does indeed come in conflict with the notion of learner-directed education. So I bounce back and forth between my need to ensure that students are minimally competent to letting them choose what they want to learn about.

Both Kelley and Krishnamurti have helped to inform me in my ongoing exploration and questioning of education and how best to engage in that process. In a sense, one can think of these educators as colors in a spectrum, not contradicting each other so much as shading, subtly or abruptly, into one another. Kelley, with his metaphysical (or quantum physical) theories about perception and reality, shakes our perhaps inflexible beliefs, loosening us up for Krishnamurti, the radical, who challenges everything we think, urging us to open our minds to greater possibilities.

These educators have helped me to remember to ask myself what's worth teaching and knowing and what is the best way to get that to happen.

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